

TRAINING NOTES



Rifle Marksmanship Lessons

CAPTAIN PHILIP K. ABBOTT

In the U.S. Marine Corps, marksmanship tradition has been at the pinnacle of all training events. Although the procedures and techniques the Marines use are generally the same ones we use in the Army, they focus more on a progressive marksmanship training system. The system first emphasizes learning, reviewing, and reinforcing the fundamental firing skills and only later shifts to emphasizing the application of marksmanship skills in combat. Through this progressive program, Marines achieve a high state of combat readiness, because each individual rifleman develops confidence and becomes thoroughly proficient with his weapon.

In an effort to improve our soldiers' overall marksmanship skills, my company underwent a modified version of Marine Corps marksmanship training, and some of the noncommissioned officers went through a Marine Corps marksmanship coaching school. My unit found this experience beneficial, and I believe certain aspects of the Marine Corps' marksmanship training might be incorporated into the Army's marksmanship programs.

The fundamentals a rifleman must learn during Marine Corps marksmanship training are broken down into three phases: preparatory marksmanship

instruction, known-distance (KD) range firing, and field range firing. These three phases are taught in sequence, and all three are considered whenever marksmanship training is conducted, regardless of the rifleman's level of experience.

FOUNDATION

Preparatory marksmanship instruction is the training rifleman receive before firing on a live fire range. (Marines go through one week of preparatory instruction before each live fire.) It is during this phase that rifleman build a sound foundation by either learning, reviewing, or reinforcing good firing principles. Since the degree of proficiency a rifleman achieves depends upon the foundation that is built during this phase, the correct firing habits must become second nature to him. Drilling in these fundamentals, along with continued supervision, brings the greatest results. Although proper firing can be a complex process, when it is practiced frequently enough and precisely enough, it becomes a learned skill the rifleman will retain.

(It is equally important for every rifleman, regardless of his level of experience, to refamiliarize himself

periodically with the fundamentals, because even the most experienced rifleman sometimes does not properly apply the correct fundamentals. Any such deficiencies can be overcome, however, through the use of dedicated coaches and extensive dry fire exercises.)

Firing on a known-distance range is probably the most critical phase of the Marine marksmanship training program. It is during this phase that a rifleman has an opportunity to put his marksmanship fundamentals into practice.

On the KD range, the Marines use sitting, kneeling, standing, and prone firing positions. They do not use sandbags for support; instead, they use their rifle slings to help stabilize their weapons.

This phase serves a number of purposes, but the primary one is to give the rifleman an opportunity to make adjustments to compensate for the effects of weather. It is important for a rifleman to understand how the various weather conditions can affect his firing performance; his skill in overcoming the negative effects of weather will determine his skill in firing on a range and, more important, in combat.

The Marine Corps goes to great lengths in teaching each rifleman the

importance of weather and its effects on a round's trajectory. In fact, each rifleman is issued a marksmanship data book that he fills out every time he qualifies, and he continues to use it as a reference whenever he undergoes marksmanship training. This book, when properly used, greatly improves his overall marksmanship performance.

A known-distance range also serves as a multipurpose range that enables the rifleman to obtain a battlesight zero efficiently from distances other than the all-too-common field expedient 25 meters and gives him the opportunity to engage targets out to a range of 500 meters. Too, a known-distance range allows a pit crew to experience the sound of rounds snapping overhead.

During the field firing phase, the riflemen apply the fundamentals they have learned on the KD range. The field firing ranges serve a three-fold purpose—to incorporate the application of basic marksmanship fundamentals to the engaging of combat targets, to further build a rifleman's confidence in his weapon, and to reemphasize the importance of obtaining a battlesight zero.

The Army has progressed in this area with the development of the Multipurpose Arcade Combat Simulator (MACS) and the Weaponeer. Still, we must not regard these as substitutes for the KD

range, but as training aids in our overall marksmanship training program.

Over the past several years, the Infantry School has taken a more serious approach in its efforts to revitalize marksmanship training. The development of the marksmanship training units and the master's program for noncommissioned officers are two excellent additions to the Army's marksmanship program. But these alone have not completely solved our marksmanship and weapon proficiency problems.

The new version of Field Manual 23-9, Rifle Marksmanship, has considerably improved unit marksmanship programs, but marksmanship training should not be limited to the doctrinal framework outlined in regulations, circulars, and unit status reports. Our inability to accept and adopt innovative and realistic marksmanship training into our existing programs may well be the crux of the problem. There are several reasons for this, but the primary one is the mistaken perception that Army Regulations and Field Manuals prohibit certain exercises.

First, we should reinstitute the use of known-distance ranges and make this a mandatory phase of marksmanship training. When a rifleman goes directly from the preparatory phase to the field fire phase, he never really learns to use his weapon completely. The Weaponeer

does duplicate a KD range to some degree, but it does not include the effects of weather.

Second, the four basic firing positions—kneeling, sitting, standing, and prone—need to be included in all phases of Army marksmanship training. When we go to combat we won't have nicely prepared foxholes or neatly stacked sandbags. Our current marksmanship program focuses on defense rather than offense. We must change this mind-set and bring it into line with the spirit of the infantry, which is attack.

Third, marksmanship training should be included in every unit's mission essential task list (METL) to ensure that it routinely receives the necessary attention.

Finally, each division should conduct an annual marksmanship competition. This will not only stimulate interest and desire on the part of the individual rifleman, it will directly involve leaders at all levels.

Good marksmanship is a critical skill that the Army needs to emphasize more if it is to prevent further decay in this area.

Captain Philip K. Abbott commanded a rifle company in the 4th Battalion, 22d Infantry, 25th Infantry Division when he wrote this article. He previously served as a battalion adjutant and assistant S-3. He is a 1982 ROTC graduate of Norwich University.

Marksmanship and the "New Focus"

CAPTAIN J. MARK CHENOWETH

I read with great interest Major General Carmen J. Cavezza's comments on the "new focus" on marksmanship (INFANTRY, November-December 1990, pages 1-2). While I agree whole-

heartedly that it is time for the infantry to move to precision marksmanship, I am concerned with the path we are taking to get there.

The new marksmanship program and

infantry one station unit training (OSUT) program of instruction (POI) should develop a more proficient marksman. General Cavezza says that "our infantry units will have to be far